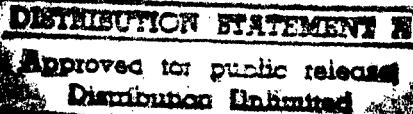


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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE PARTISAN
MOVEMENT IN SLOVAKIA

by Jiri Dolezel

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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE PARTISAN
MOVEMENT IN SLOVAKIA

[Following is a book review by Jiri Dolezel in Nova Mysl (New Mind), Prague, No 7, July 1960, pages 792-796, covering the work of Samo Faltan, Partyzani na Slovensku (Partisans in Slovakia), Prague, 1960, 250 pages.]

Problems of the partisan movement represent a very significant question in the history of World War II. We find partisan warfare, which is the highest form of the people's struggle for freedom, even in those countries which did not have even the slightest tradition of this method of warfare. This also applies to the territory of Czechoslovakia. Partisan activity in Slovakia was greatly expanded and directly connected with the origins and the process of the Slovak national uprising. This subject is treated in Samo Faltan's book Partisans in Slovakia which is now in the hands of the Czech reader in a very handsome edition subsequent to the publication of the Slovak edition Partisan Warfare in Slovakia.

Faltan's work is divided into three parts, which according to the author represent the basic stages of the development of the partisan movement in Slovakia. The first period starts with the beginning of the national liberation movement and ends on the eve of the organization of the Slovak national uprising. The author follows the beginnings of the partisan movement since the invasion of the Soviet Union. The second part is concerned with the partisan movement during the Slovak uprising, and the third part with the departure of the partisan units to the mountains.

The three basic chapters are divided into further subdivisions which divide the work chronologically and by subject. The author's basic criterium in dividing the material into periods is generally the development of the national liberation struggle, which of course does not coincide entirely with the development of the partisan movement.

In writing his book, the author used considerable archive material accumulated particularly in the archives of the Institute of History of the KSC and KSS, and also from the archives of the Institute of Military History. With regard to other political and military questions, the author used partly the existing literature and certain results of the scientific conference organized in May 1959 on the subject of the Slovak national uprising. Personal experience helped the author greatly as he participated actively in the uprising. However, the opportunities to study the partisan movement in Slovakia are by no

means exhausted. The author did not use the rich material contained in the report on the situation by the State Security Center (Ustredi statnej bezpecnosti), which contains very valuable data on the resistance movement of the Slovak people. In the same way, the author did not use the material of the verification commissions, deposited in the archives of the Institute of Military History. As far as the literature used is concerned, the bibliography is surprisingly narrow. The apparatus used by Samo Faltan often gives the reader the impression that the information, data, figures, facts are the author's discovery, as if there had been no studies or contributions to the subject prior to his work.

Nevertheless, we see that there is considerable factual material concentrated in Samo Faltan's work. In the introduction, the author points out the prerequisites for a partisan war and the conditions needed for its creation and development. The author follows the organization of partisan units and their formation by individual regions. During the uprising, he pays particular attention to the united fighting of partisans and soldiers in various areas of Slovakia. In the concluding part, he discusses again the partisan activity in eastern and central Slovakia and along the Slovak-Moravian border. While discussing the partisan movement, the author also gives an analysis of the plans of the bourgeoisie to use the Slovak army and describes the role of the insurgent army in the Slovak people's struggle for national liberation. In conclusion, the author attempts to determine the significance of the partisan movement from the viewpoint of the creation of popular-democratic Czechoslovakia.

The facts presented by the author show the enormous determination of the Slovak working masses who, headed by the Communists, fought the clergy-fascist regime of Tisa and Tuka. The reader finds much interesting material about the Communists, who organized and led the resistance of the Czechoslovak people. The work contains many factual data on the fighting activities of the partisan units and on the losses which they inflicted upon the enemy. The data are also supplemented by maps covering primarily the period of partisan activity during the Slovak national uprising and various sectors of military action carried out by large partisan units in individual stages of the warfare. The material contained in Faltan's work disproves the slanders spread by the Western reactionary circles that the Czechoslovak people did not organize any resistance and were resigned to the occupation regime in one form or another. The author also collected additional facts about the activities of Slovak traitors: the Catholic clergy, government, Hlinka guards. However, it is surprising that the author did not summarize his research to show the total fighting contribution and the effective share of fighting Slovakia in the defeat of German fascism.

The main contribution of Faltan's work consists in the rich amount of material. It shows that the development of the Slovak partisan movement was basically similar and followed the same laws, even though under different conditions and in a different political situation, as that in the Czech Lands. The partisan movement in Slovakia entered a decisive stage the moment it received military-organizational and military-technical assistance from the Soviet Union. This is especially proved in the first part of Faltan's work, in which a separate chapter is consecrated to the arrival of Czechoslovak-Soviet paratrooper units sent by the Soviet partisan command according to the plans of the KSC leadership in Moscow to the occupied territory of the Republic. Of course, the author did not analyze the new degree of partisan activity in Slovakia and the assistance on which these paratrooper units could base their activity.

Samo Faltan limited himself to three basic stages which are basically correct, but insufficient in a work of this type. It seems that in presenting the development the author was not guided by the material and the facts, but by the stages of the liberation struggle in Slovakia which he determined in advance. These stages in turn are divided in a more detailed manner, especially the period 1941-1944. The victory of the Soviet armies at Stalingrad was reflected in the total resistance movement both in the Czech Lands as well as in Slovakia. The passing of the initiative into the hands of the Soviet army was reflected also in the development of the partisan movement. But the author did not clarify in his own mind certain differences between the periods of the partisan movement and of the struggle for national liberation. This struggle represents a generalization of the whole complex process of the struggle for freedom and also includes the results of the armed struggle. Obviously the main reason for this is that the author did not set himself such a goal and did not try to reach it.

The author proceeded to write his work about the partisans in Slovakia from a narrowly limited point of view. We cannot expect from the author that his work should serve as a substitute of the history of the Slovak people's struggle for national liberation, that it should discuss in detail the struggle of the Communist Party and the various forms of the resistance activity, that the author should examine the process in which the position of the class of manual workers in the nation became stronger, and that he should study a whole series of other questions. Nor do we expect the author to examine how the national liberation movement turned into a national and democratic revolution, which is one of the basic theoretical problems of this period. On the other hand, these questions cannot be just bypassed and ignored. A number of written works discussing in detail the question of the Slovak national uprising were written during the fifteen years since the victorious conclusion of the struggle for national liberation. Therefore it was possible to use them. Samo Faltan did not enter any virgin land.

Judging by Faltan's book, the partisan movement represented a completely independent component of the resistance activity, torn away from the other forms of the struggle. To the extent that the author speaks about these other forms, he mentions them as examples (page 21) rather than as a summary and a starting point to study higher forms of the resistance which attacked fascism more efficiently. But above all, the origin of the partisan movement is isolated from the great social and political changes which occurred in Slovakia in the years of World War II. The author omits the basic questions which led the Slovak people into the struggle against fascism. It is known that the situation in 1939, when the so-called Slovak State was born, was basically different from the situation in 1944. The author passes over and ignores what changes in views occurred among the Slovak people during that short period, what led the Slovak people to take up arms against the Tiso-Tuka regime. The author's outline is completely devoid of any consideration of the economic, political and social development in Slovakia, which is covered by a number of existing publications. Naturally, the issue is not that such an analysis should be considered as dues paid by the author to some statistical surveys giving documentary material about the crisis of the bourgeois society. Once upon a time such dues used to be obligatory. But the author did not take advantage of the existing works of research and did not use them as a basis in examining the political development. And after all, the partisan movement is a part of the political development. This insufficient preparation is necessarily reflected both in the outline of the political questions, as well as in the processing of the problems of the partisan movement itself.

Faltan limits the partisan movement essentially to the military-organizational aspect of it. For that reason, the description itself becomes to a great extent not only dry, but also mosaic-like, and it lacks clarity. The work lacks solid historical logics and a compact structure of the problems. For example, we can mention the description of activities of Jan Zizka brigade under the command of Usiak and Murzin. These activities are isolated and described in several places (pages 144, 225).

Faltan's inadequate views of the laws of the social process in Slovakia, which led the working masses to part with separatism and brought them to the position of a new Czechoslovak state unity, are reflected in the author's evaluation of the plans of the bourgeoisie to use the Slovak army. The author confuses the Slovak soldiers with the army, which as an organization represented an organ of power of the Slovak State. True, this organ was breaking up, but only on the basis of this break-up it could be converted into a truly revolutionary army. The author is a prisoner of the idea of some organizational superiority (nadrazenost) of the army, of the concept of a state which does not involve classes (netridni chapani statu) [he actually uses the terms "misuse" of the army (page 104) by a bourgeoisie of all shades]. The author's facts in connection with the question of what to do with

the Slovak army in conflict with some of his conclusions. Samo Faltan speaks in one place about "indecision and hesitation of officers which became fatal" (page 107), and then again says that fascism is falling into ruins and that therefore the officers are abandoning it (page 108), or that the officers' corps is "mostly also oriented against fascism" (page 104). These contradictions in the author's description have deeper roots.

The author did not clearly understand that the moment the issue was to start an uprising, the decision also concerned the relationship of the people who were supposed to ensure the uprising through the so-called Slovak army with regard to the reestablishment of a unified Czechoslovak Republic. He does not pose the question of which social strata in Slovakia represented the social support of the Tisa-Tuka regime and were isolated in the course of the struggle for liberation. The text does not clearly show that the decisive and preponderant part of the Slovak people considered the reestablishment of a unified Czechoslovak Republic as an entirely lawful requirement. The author did not show that the masses of the Slovak people gave up the idea of a so-called Slovak State not only because they became convinced of its anti-popular character, but also because they became convinced of its anti-national character. The experience of the masses with the German imperialism, with which the rulers in Bratislava had joined their own existence, played an important role. The book does not show that this process was most intensive among the people who suffered most from the war and from the disastrous split between Czechs and the Slovaks. The author's resolution of these questions is not sufficient: he merely states that it was the desire and the effort to establish "coexistence of the Czech and Slovak nation in a brotherly union of equal partners" (page 85). The work deals little with the competing differences of the Czech and the Slovak bourgeoisie. In this connection, the author attributes to the Czech bourgeoisie a much greater influence in preparing the plans for the military uprising than existed in reality.

In this connection, it would be certainly appropriate if the author had dealt in more detail with Catlos' plan and with the attitude of the Slovak bourgeoisie to his intentions. The question of separation was not vanquished by the Slovak bourgeoisie; it continued as a specter haunting the minds of those preparing the plan to use the Slovak army militarily. It is known that Benes was very indignant about Catlos' plan, of which the illegal SNR (Slovak National Council) was informed. Indeed, Benes saw in it a threat to the plans of the Czech bourgeoisie to reestablish a bourgeois Czechoslovakia. Therefore, we cannot accept without reservations the author's assertion that the measure of the military center "was directed by the London emigre government" (page 87).

The fact that the author ignores certain basic questions concerning the origin of the Slovak national uprising is also reflected in his evaluation of the roles played by Husak and Novomesky, roles

which were, to say the least, quite strange. When the author speaks about the activities of bourgeois nationalists, he evaluates their agreement with the bourgeois concept of using the Slovak army as "a serious mistake" (page 241), or he says that "they did not perceive the harm" of this bourgeois concept (page 57). This is related to the author's assertion that the Slovak bourgeoisie was covering its reactionary activity by its Czechoslovak orientation (page 240).

Today, we have established sufficiently and convincingly how harmful and disruptive the activity of bourgeois nationalists was, how they catered to the Slovak bourgeoisie. Any bypassing of this question conflicts with objective historical reality and misrepresents the role of the Communist Party. The Party fought consistently for a new Czechoslovakia which, as a popular state, would give equal rights to the Czech as well as to the Slovak nation.

The work does not analyze sufficiently the role of the Moscow leadership of the KSC in preparing the partisan movement in Slovakia. In this connection, valuable instructions transmitted to the Slovak people through the broadcast station "For Slovak Freedom" deserve more of the author's attention. These instructions show that the Moscow leadership of the KSC made efforts to integrate the broadest possible strata of the people in the struggle against fascism. It also made efforts to use the Slovak soldiers. That does not mean, of course, that it prepared the military uprising. It gave all its support to the uprising when the uprising began.

We could expect that the author would use more his experience and his contacts with former Soviet partisan commanders to give a fuller picture of the Soviet assistance given to the Czechoslovak people in accordance with the obligations based on the Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance.

As we said before, the author conceives the partisan movement as separate from the total tasks of the struggle for national liberation. The author avoids the problem of how the Communists fought for a common state of the Czechs and the Slovaks and how the partisan movement also served these aims. In planning actions by paratroops, the Moscow leadership of the KSC started on the assumption that the Slovak territory would be used in further developments as a base of partisan activities in the Czech Lands. But the author mentions these ideas only casually. Also, the author does not take into consideration the different conditions in the Czech Lands, the various forms of resistance which the Czech people were using and by which they also intensified the struggle for the new Republic under the leadership of the Communist Party. The author simplifies and narrows the question of the origin of the partisan movement in the Czech Lands. He concludes and evaluates the chapter about the fighting on the Moravian-Slovak border as follows: "The partisan warfare in Slovakia found a great echo among the Czech people and aroused them to make mass preparations for an armed struggle" (page 226). Undoubtedly, the Slovak national uprising had a great

influence on the resistance movement in the Czech Lands. But we cannot reduce the growth of the resistance in the Czech Lands only to the question of influences. Besides, the influence of the rising Slovak people was not the only influence. In the same way, the question of the struggle of the Czech and Slovak people united directly during the uprising is answered only by a few words which say nothing. The author also gives new figures on the participation of the Czechs in the uprising (page 235). I do not mean to start a discussion about the figures. But of course it is necessary for the author to use at least a note to subject the existing views to a criticism and to justify his views. The author proceeds in the same way when he determines numbers with regard to the question of international solidarity during the uprising (page 235). Czech assistance to the Slovak national uprising and the international solidarity was based not only on direct participation, but also on the new partisan movement forming in the Czech Lands with the support of the Moscow leadership of the KSC and with the assistance of the Soviet partisan command. In the opinion of this reviewer, it was necessary at least to make a note of these questions in the book. As it is, the work loses a great deal of its political value, because examples and experiences taken from the common struggle of the Czech and Slovak people against fascism serve to strengthen the unity of socialist Czechoslovakia.

We can also mention other reservations in Samo Faltan's work, especially with regard to the methodology itself. It is not clear how the author proceeded in verifying and checking individual data. References to the material in the archives of the Institute for the History of the KSC and KSS do not mean anything. The materials covering the partisan movement contain much subjective material. The citations do not always make it clear on what the author based his statements. Also, the author is not consistent in his citations. For example, he says that in 1942 more than 500 men were organized in the Janosik legions (page 21). But he does not say on what source he bases this statement. The same applies to his description of the beginnings of partisan activities in central Slovakia (pages 32, 33, 38) and in other places. As to the facts, the author does not consider it necessary to give a critical analysis of the existing views, even when it is indispensable from the viewpoint of further research. In the same way, the author does not give a thought to questions which concern his subject: the relationship between partisan and small warfare. Such opinions can be given even on the basis of the rich experience of the Slovak people with regard to warfare. The work also shows considerable disproportions. For example, the author pays little attention to the beginnings of the partisan movement. The lack of balance in the structure is also reflected in subordinated questions. The author includes the political-educational work of the partisan units only at the end of the work (pages 230-238), although the logics of his narration require a more logical integration of this question in the period of the origins and the development of the partisan activity.

Samo Faltan's work contains valuable and interesting documentary material about the development of the partisan movement in Slovakia. It offers a certain picture of the extent of the armed resistance of the Slovak people against fascism. Therefore it will certainly become an aid for the historians. When we finish reading the book, we regret that it does not give a deeper picture of the partisan activity in Slovakia. Its value can be measured on the basis of the existing research with regard to the problems of partisans in Czechoslovakia. This research is very advanced, particularly in Slovakia. Under these circumstances, the work of Samo Faltan did not maintain the same pace. We can expect the author to handle these shortcomings in his further studies of these questions, and that his research will take a more active share of the studies of the partisan movement. The questions concerning the partisan movement have more than academic significance. They concern actual experiences paid for with blood. The point is that Czechoslovak historians should also take an active part in generalizing these experiences in the interest of the struggle carried out by oppressed masses and nations without equal rights. This political aspect of the issue is not in conflict with its scientific character. On the contrary, it requires that the author has a deep understanding of all these related issues.

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